

The Washington Merry-Go-Round

Navy Secretive On Hill 'Junkets'

By Drew Pearson

The U. S. Navy on most matters is one of the frankest outfits in Washington. But there is one thing the Navy just will not talk about — congressional junkets.

Its spokesmen get red in the face, stammer, squirm, and duck. But they will not reveal the names of Congressmen flying in Navy planes, especially Congressmen who sit on the Appropriations Committee, which vote them money.

At least the Navy will not reveal this super-secret information when it has been properly alerted by superiors in the Defense Department and by irate Congressmen who don't want it revealed.

One Navy spokesman did answer a query last week regarding Senators flying to a NATO meeting in Paris on a Navy plane for Thanksgiving in Europe. Apparently he considered this a routine request; for he stated that four Republican Senators — Bridges of New Hampshire, Mundt of South Dakota, Dirksen of Illinois and Young of North Dakota — were flying to Dublin, Paris, Rome and Lisbon with a return through winter-resort Bermuda. Their wives, he said, were accompanying them.

He was in error regarding Sen. Mundt. The Senator from South Dakota was slated to take the trip with Mrs. Mundt, but at the last minute dropped out.

He did not need to explain that all the above Senators are members of the Senate Appropriations Committee.



Pearson

After the above information was published in this column—erroneously in regard to Sen. Mundt—a deluge of squawks began to rain down on various parts of Washington. They rained on this office for saying that Sen. Mundt had gone to Europe when he had not. They also rained on the Navy's press relations office for admitting that any Senators with wives had flown to Europe. Finally, it was pointed out that other Congressmen, including members of both houses and both political parties, had also flown to Europe.

It was at this point that all naval spokesmen clammed up. Asked for the names of all members of Congress who flew to Europe in Navy planes, the Navy refused to talk. After three or four hours of consultation with higher-ups in the Pentagon, the Navy stated officially that it could say nothing except to give out the names of Navy personnel who had accompanied the Senators.

They Vote the Dough

"On the party with the Senators were Rear Adm. Jack McCain, Chief of the Legislative Office; Brig. Gen. J. D. Hittle of the Marine Corps,

also of the Legislative Office; Comdr. R. E. Elliott, and two yeomen," said the Navy spokesman. The Legislative Office is the group which the Navy keeps on Capitol Hill to answer congressional questions and generally keep Congressmen and Senators happy.

The Navy spokesman a few minutes later phoned to volunteer the fact that there was one further piece of publishable information—namely, the Navy had supplied three planes.

"The matter has been taken up to the highest authority in the Pentagon," he explained unhappily, "but we can give no names of civilian passengers."

Later he called again, still understandingly unhappy.

"Mr. Murray Snyder," he said, referring to the Assistant Secretary of Defense who used to help handle Eisenhower's press relations, "calls attention to a ruling by the Comptroller General that the law makes it clear that the 'accountability of military transportation is the sole responsibility of the Appropriations Committee.' Therefore we cannot talk."

Here's Who Went

Meanwhile this column has been able to obtain the names of the other junketing solons and what planes they took to the NATO meeting. One plane, as previously reported, carried only the three potent Republican members of the Senate Appropriations Committee. Why three Republicans and their wives should occupy one whole plane is not known.

The other planes were more crowded. Ten Congressmen, most with wives, were listed to fly to Paris for Thanksgiving, the trip arranged by the House Administration Committee: Wayne Hays (Ohio), Frank Smith (Miss.), Armistead Selden (Ala.), Isidore Dollinger (N. Y.), Eugene McCarthy (Minn.), George McGovern (S. D.), all Democrats; with Jackson Betts (Ohio), Gordon Canfield (N. J.), Karl Le Compte (Iowa), and Robert Corbett (Pa.), Republicans.

Seven Senators listed for another plane were venerable Theodore Francis Green (R. I.), who has no wife; Estes Kefauver (Tenn.), who did not take his redheaded wife Nancy; Henry Jackson (Wash.), who has no wife; Herman Talmadge (Ga.) and wife; all Democrats; with Tom Kuchel (Calif.) and wife; Roman Hruska (Neb.), and Jacob Javits (N. Y.), Republicans. The above were all listed for the trips, though Representative Dollinger previously stated that he was paying for his wife on a commercial line.

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